

ESTIMABLE RHETORIC

How one cross-disciplinary approach can revolutionize music performance

Bram Wayman • April 2021

A few years ago, I accompanied a number of students downtown to a performance by an established classical music ensemble in Hartford, Connecticut. The evening's program featured a guest artist and two towering works by major composers. On paper, it was a concert not to be missed. In my memory, it lives on in enduring blandness, one of the more generic performances I'm able to recall from recent years.

Perhaps the reason this one endures, while other unremarkable performances have faded quickly from the album of my recollections, is that I am certain I failed my students that night. This was supposed to be the pinnacle, the splendor of the musical art from the highest peak: *work hard enough, and you'll sound like this someday*. The music we heard exhibited some successes — the ensemble certainly played with stupendous technical craft — but it clearly wasn't a peak worth the climb. The music we witnessed that night didn't grip me in the slightest. The phrasing never seduced, the dynamics never startled. What was missing?

For my students — for high school instrumentalists, for collegiate singers, even for middle school composers — the answer is a methodology of musical emotion. Exercises on fingering and intonation and instrumental technique abound in our curricula and in the published literature, but teachings on specific approaches to emotion and emoting, to musical narration and storytelling, are almost nonexistent. To be sure, students of all ages discuss emotion in music every week! — but that work usually entails one of the following:

- ✦ Executing composers' markings, such as dynamics, and assuming that doing so will communicate the right emotion;
- ✦ Making arch-shaped phrases that are assumed to convey emotion, with no inquiry into the emotion's specifics or its validity in the musical story;
- ✦ Playing with more wild abandon, which starts students musing on the commonly-encountered, and deeply false, dichotomy in which music is either played accurately or is fun to play.

There is a single solution to all of these problems: a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western methodology known as MUSICAL RHETORIC. Musical rhetoric is the art and the practice of using emotive techniques and gestures derived from public speaking and from the theater in musical performance. Its goal is convincing, effective musical storytelling, and it is wildly effective indeed. It provides an entire analytical framework for specific emotions in music, encourages links between latent or possible emotions and the performance choices needed to realize them in sound, and helps performers develop contextual awareness to the interplay of parts in a score and parts within an ensemble. It is useful to vocalists and instrumentalists alike; it can be handily applied to most repertoire — classical, jazz, and popular; and it is accessible to capable, reasonably skilled musicians of nearly all ages. I have taught it to high school students at The Watkinson School and to collegiate and professional students at the practicum I founded, The Musical Rhetoric Workshop, and have become convinced of its immense potential.

It works like this.

THE ELEMENTS OF RHETORIC

It is impossible to communicate, with written language alone, the feeling of music performed rhetorically well, but an attempt to do it justice tells that such music is gripping, electrifying, in a way that is at odds with what is on the page. The architecture of Bach, the grandeur of Handel, and even the flash of solo virtuosi like Biber and Matteis usually are not thought of as thrill rides. But music performed rhetorically, with all the skill and verve and full-body commitment that it takes to do so, is indeed thrilling, to the degree that considerations of compositional craft, tone and timbre, and all the usual things we listen critically for are immediately cast away. Your heart rate rises. You're aware it's just a violin tune in G major, but you feel as if you're hanging on for dear life.

Musical rhetoric, drawn as it is from oratory, is entirely designed around one imperative: to convince your audience to feel the way the music feels, or the way you feel as you play that music.¹ This is its bedrock. Rhetoric's original purpose, in its Greco-Roman roots, was to capture and convince: public speeches, even legal arguments, were only worth anything if they made a discernible impact on their listeners. The same is true, musical rhetoricians argue, of music: its goal is to affect the emotions of its audience, to bring them in line with the emotions in the composer's ink and the performers' sounds.

Musical rhetoric's success at this rests on two central concepts: AFFECT and GESTURE.

Affect, as already hinted at, refers to the feeling that a section of music has the power to rouse in the audience: it affects how they feel. Affect can be thought of as the "dramatic quality," "character," or "dramatic color" of the music; some musicians also speak of "mood" in the same

1. Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric*, 39, 70.

way. Affect can be conceived of at the level of single sounds, of phrases, of sections, or even of entire movements.

Determining affect is something of a two-way street between an entire passage (or piece) of music and all of its constituent sounds, but the best place to start is with pieces of music whose dramatic quality or mood are easily explained in just one or two words. For example, this passage

Oboes;
Violins I & II

Violin III

Viola

Tutti li Bassi

Handel, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (HWV 17), overture, part i.

could be very aptly described as “imperious,” capturing both its towering sound and dangerous sense of caprice. There’s something resplendent about the basses’ restatement of the oboes’ and violins’ melody, like arch upon arch in a palace, and yet — especially in the violas’ leap into the third bar — you can almost hear the emperor snapping his gaze about, challenging you to look into his eyes.

Before reading the description below this next example, ask yourself what the single strongest clue to its affect is:

Horns in D

Chorus

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Bassi

Ach, daß du den Him-mel zer-ris-sest, ach!

Ach, daß du den Him-mel zer-ris-sest, ach!

[f]

[f]

[f]

[f]

p

p

p

p

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, *Ach, dass du den Himmel zerrissest* (FK 93)

Many elements in this formidable cantata sound with verve and strength, but the single greatest sonic weight is carried by the unison chorus, for unison choruses are unusual in Baroque music. The fact of its unison, coupled with its rapidly rising line, points to affects of “triumph” or “splendor.” (This music is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a Christmas cantata.)

Some musicians, especially of older generations, may be familiar with a once-popular term, “the doctrine of the affects” (or “affections”), which stated that Baroque music presented one specific emotion per piece. Like the concept of “terraced dynamics,” the “doctrine of the affects” is an extreme; rhetorically made music is usually more nuanced, supple, and multi-faceted than the doctrine reads. Affects local and global abound in all sorts of repertoire, certainly so in Baroque music, and they often overlap or occur simultaneously.

If affect is the hand on the tiller of musical rhetoric, the wind in its sails is music’s smallest building blocks: snippets of sound called GESTURES. A gesture is any single element or event

in music that has a discrete and easily perceptible sonic identity. Two notes linked in their behavior, tendency, or articulation; a quick run or group of notes; even a single chord standing alone: all these can act as gestures. In Baroque music — and much other repertoire — gestures can each convey a specific affect. Much Baroque music is constructed out of chains of gestures.² The similarity of this construction to the assembly of words and punctuation into sentences is commonly cited in Baroque writings on musical composition.³

The lines of this typical Baroque chamber piece are easily broken up into sonic “words,” shown here with horizontal brackets:

Couperin, *Les Nations*, “L’Imperiale” (troisième ordre), no. viii.

This attractive, well-known tune is constructed from only a small handful of gestures, used over and over with slight modifications. Notice how differently the three-note group sounds when, instead of playing a slur over all of its notes, only two are slurred, with a staccato dot following.

Bach, *Wachet auf* (BWV 140), mvt. iv ritornello.

2. Haynes, *The End of Early Music*, 191.

3. A good starting point for reading Baroque primary sources on musical rhetoric are Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, part II, chapter 9, and Quantz, *Versuch einer Univeisung Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, chapter 9, especially section 3.

One of the best ways to develop your ability to delineate gesture is to use a dictionary of rhetorical FIGURES. A figure is a sort of official rhetorical gesture, one that earned itself a place in the musico-rhetorical encyclopaediae that were fashionable to assemble during musical rhetoric's heyday, especially in Germany. A large number of gestures have historically defined meanings. Occasionally they turn up, denuded of their rhetorical context, in wider musical discourse; you may have run across "the pianto gesture" (a descending half-step, representing crying or tears) or the "gropo" (a group of four quick notes, the first and third of which are the same pitch) when studying, for example, Bach's *St. John Passion*. I remember wondering, for years, why I was supposed to know what "the passus duriusculus" was, why it had an identity, why it mattered that it did, and, most problematically of all, how its identity was supposed to help me use it. As it turns out, knowing a body of gestures, of figures, and their expected or codified meanings helps us develop our ability to know what figures look like in general, to natively identify or invent them, and to determine what affect we might play them with. It even helps us improvise more readily and more powerfully, and helps us compose. Knowing, for example, that the passus duriusculus, a fully chromatic descent spanning a fourth, is a single long gesture lends a quiet, sea-swell power to the bass of Dido's final aria in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, which in turn would surely influence our interpretation of its melodic phrasing, helping us create the ebb and flow of its long, sad sobs.

Once you start to learn to recognize gestures, they seem to crop up everywhere, in all sorts of notated repertoire. The *corta*, a figure of one short note and two very short notes, gives dimension to this violin-viola interplay in Grażyna Bacewicz's *Concerto for String Orchestra*...



Bacewicz, *Concerto for String Orchestra*, mvt. i, one measure before reh. 18.

...and lends different flairs to Zack Smith's brass-quintet arrangement of Camila Cabello's

Havana:



Camila Cabello, *Havana*, arr. Zack Smith, m. 56

This backing rhythm from Roy Philippe's arrangement of Count Basie's *Blue and Sentimental* is built out of gestures that classical musicians three hundred years ago would never have named, but that are iconic to swing sound:



Count Basie, *Blue and Sentimental*, arr. Roy Philippe, mm. 13–14.

Not all figures are directly related to words or collocations in speech. Many, rather, have to do with the interplay of different elements, as poetic devices do. There are figures for breaks and pauses (the *ellipsis* among them), for repetition (the *fuga*), and for things composed or performed in unexpected places. The drama of this passage in Monteverdi's "Ecco, Silvio" heightens severely when we treat the upper voices as a *heterolepsis* — a rhetorical device in which one part seizes the range of another:



Monteverdi, "Ecco, Silvio, colei che 'n odio hai tanto," Book V of madrigals, mm. 11–16.

It is an old saw in Baroque rhetoric treatises that no comprehensive catalogue of musical-rhetorical figures could ever be compiled. The differences in what counts as a figure, and what each one is to feel like, are too subjective. Throughout the entire Baroque age, musical rhetoric theorists disagreed on the sources, too, of figures: some are rooted more specifically in oratory, and others in more purely musical devices; some hew closer to the definition of gesture-as-sonic-event, while others tackle larger structures — an entire imitative or fugal statement, for example.⁴ Even rhetorical meanings that might have been widely agreed upon are lost to us today. As with traditional allegorical devices (oboes representing the underworld, flutes representing the countryside, &c.), we are too far socially and culturally removed from the courts and chapels in which these conventional connotations lived for them to resonate organically with our heartbeats. In my opinion, this sets us wonderfully free to determine our own meanings. We can decide on gesture and affect based less on historical definitions of each and more on what each individual element of the music feels like to each of us, based on its inherent sound and its place in its musical story.

There is a slight amount of cross-over between affective gesture and tone-painting, the depiction of non-musical imagery in musical sound. In Allan Miller's documentary *Playing with Fire: Jeannette Sorrell and the Mysteries of Conducting*, Sorrell is seen encouraging the players of Apollo's Fire to perform a certain gesture to sound like it takes more effort, as if someone is

4. Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, 277–282.

clambering onto a horse. The score the orchestra is rehearsing is Telemann's *Don Quixote Suite*, in which the sounds and shouts and sighs of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza actually do appear, as if painted into music. Musical rhetoric normally deals with more abstract passages than these "realist" depictions of the extra-musical world, but when they do appear, the scenes or tales from which they are drawn provide obvious clues to each gesture's meaning, and offer cinematic opportunities on stage.

MUSICAL RHETORIC IN ACTION: REHEARSAL AND PEDAGOGY

The best way to see musical rhetoric in action is to try it yourself, so here follow a set of examples written out to mimic actual rehearsal proceedings. Musical rhetoric's workings are revealed most clearly in the Baroque music which the entire methodology was designed to perform, so the examples that follow are drawn from that repertory. Play or sing as you follow along, and see what decisions you arrive at and what sounds you produce.

First, consider just this opening line from an Act I triumphing chorus in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. In celebration of the imminent union of the two heroes, who fall in love rather against their better judgment, the whole court here bursts into song. This line is performed by the bass voices (choral and instrumental):

Bass

To the Hills and the Vales, to the Rocks and the Moun-tains,

Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, Act I, chorus: "To the Hills and the Vales."

The most immediately noticeable, identifiable snippet of sound that can make a convincing emotional statement is the fifth leap on “the Vales.” (Rhetorical encyclopaediae would refer to

this gesture as a *salte semplice* figure, a consonant leap.) Begin by asking the question: “What do fifth leaps sound like?” They can sound triumphant, like they’ve arrived at someplace glittering and grand, or they can sound aspirational, like a hero in the midst of battle or the call of the trumpeter who is urging her on. The two interpretations are rather at odds: one has arrived, the other still strives. We need more information to determine the affect of this gesture.

Be a musical detective and look for clues. “To the hills” is a *corta* that is mirrored by “To the rocks,” which arrives on the high statement of the tonic tone from which the passage departed. (Identifying the two *cortas* helps me hear the music that they span, looking forward from the first and backward from the second; without listening rhetorically, I might hear them forward-only, each as it relates just to the poetic line that it begins.) This line is powerfully bound together: “To the Hills” and “to the Rocks” form rhythmic and tonal bookends. The “vales” leap is in between them in time and tone, only rising halfway across the pitch gamut. It is not so much an arrival, then, as an aspiration — and this is an answer to our first question. Finalize the analysis by attempting to describe the leap’s affect as specifically as possible. Is the leap eager? surging? hopeful?

Once you’ve decided on your exact interpretation of “the vales,” try different performance methods to realize its affect, to make its dramatic character come alive. If you are a choral bass, sing with a particularly active diaphragm; if you’re in the orchestra, try digging the bow a little faster into the string. If you are the conductor, conduct low (for breath) and, with your non-dominant hand, give a strong, slow gesture that leads the performers, not to “vales,” but all the way to “rocks,” showing the character of “vales” with your dominant hand’s downbeat and with your eyes.

Next, consider the first violins in this excerpt from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. At this moment in Act II, the Countess hems and haws, hoping to avoid admitting to her furious husband that his enemy is hiding in her closet! The violins color the scene, giving us her trembling and hesitation. These three-note, slurred octaves are each one gesture: distinctly and discretely audible, and, as it happens, one of the most noticeable parts of the texture. In other contexts, the same three notes might sound anything from stark to triumphant, but here, they have the potential to sound tremulous, even fearful. Affect and gesture are met together! Choose a performance technique that realizes them. If you imagine yourself in the violin section, you might play with more brushed tone, with more air in the sound, or you might try a faster bow speed. If you were in the cello or bass section, you might play a little more softly, or with slightly more bite to the first note of each of your slurred groups, each a very different technique to enhance the first violins' sound. If you were the conductor, you would decide among conflicting approaches ahead of time, and direct the players to such things in rehearsal (I have "TREMBLING" written at the top of my conductor's score here). When one gesture sounds, everyone in the ensemble must hear and respond, in order for its affect to carry clearly to the audience.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Violins and La Contessa. The Violins part is in 4/4 time and features three slurred groups of three notes each, marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The La Contessa part is in 4/4 time and shows her vocal line with lyrics 'Va - do... si... ma...'.

Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Act II, Finale.

Lastly, examine this excerpt from Act II of John Blow's *Venus and Adonis*. It is a dance of Cupids, just after they have discussed with Venus the wiles and retributions that fletch the arrows of Love. It is a typical "thin" Baroque score, largely devoid of interpretive instructions, rich with

narrative possibility. Every line is built of gestures. The first-violin line, two measures before the high Gs, skips in impudent rhythms, smirking in sound, in what is either one long two-bar gesture or a few short ones — the analysis is up to you. Likely each high G is its own gesture, ringing out like bells. The second violins' paired-eighth pickup, into the third bar shown here, is either a gesture of its own or part of a three-note gesture including the following downbeat A; delineating the gestures in the following bars depends on (or will have an impact on!) which one you hear it as. A similar decision must be made regarding the quarter- and half-note pairs in the viola. Consider each pair a two-note gesture, then ask yourself which comes first, the quarters or the halves: one makes this a pickup gesture, the other a sturdy long-short downbeat rhythm. The bass is full of animated motion, most of it downward and full of eighths, probably clues that the dotted half note G begins a series of one-note gestures, a solution which fits nicely as a restatement of the first violins. The structure of the opera influences the affect of all of these: coming on the heels of the dialogue with Venus, this dance only makes sense to be a little wicked, full of winks and wiggling eyebrows. Which gestural decisions, which rhythmic divisions, tell that story in a way that will best convince the audience?



Blow, *Venus and Adonis*, cupids' dance.

Once you have identified the gestures in Blow's score, it is once again up to you, as the performer, to match performance techniques with the shapes and emotions latent on the page. A

great deal will be solved by simply playing each gesture by itself, like practicing individual words in a speech, and then chaining them together, weighing their relative balance and power. For string players, a stronger bow-stroke, or starting near the frog, might yield a heftier sound — a contender for carrying the right affect of a few of these gestures, but not all. The violist might trill F-E on the downbeat of the tenth bar shown here, for a particularly bitter pang of love — or, if the first violinist trilled simultaneously, a certain grandiose effect would lead nicely to the B-flat harmony of the following bar. The conductor or the continuo section might decide for multiple instruments to play; imagine the sprightly quality of this music with both an archlute and a guitar.

Musical rhetoric pedagogy mostly overlaps with these sorts of practice- and rehearsal- techniques. As a practical toolkit, after all, musical rhetoric should be taught hands-on, and preparing repertoire for performance provides the best opportunities to use these tools, to learn to feel and act out the moving parts of a musical story. A handful of the pedagogical techniques most foundational to musical rhetoric have already been discussed: always building on the twin foundation of affect and gesture, then experimenting with matching performance choices; using contextual clues; “playing musical detective.” There are other, more specifically pedagogical, activities that I have found useful as well.

The simplest, and most obvious, technique to use when teaching musical rhetoric is what I call “the adverb method.” Once a student has identified a gesture and its associated affect, ask them to perform it, then poll their peers to see if they felt the desired affect. Imagine a horn player intends for a passage’s affect to be grand. “Did she play it grandly?” you ask. Or if a bassoonist intends for a gesture to sound vicious: “Did they play it viciously?” Usually this elicits a good

amount of laughter, especially among students who are new to musical rhetoric; it's somewhat liberating to see how little emotion we often put into our notes, to know we're all together, standing at the open door.

I employ a highly perceptive analytical technique from Patrica Ranum's *The Harmonic Orator* (see the Review of Literature, below): line diagrams that show the ebb and flow of passion within a single phrase. These diagrams visualize the human-scale detail of the music, and help break old habits, such as expecting that the highest pitch in a passage is its strongest point.⁵ At the Musical Rhetoric Workshop, students examine analytical examples from Ranum's later chapters and attempt to track phrases' internal energies and tendencies in our own repertoire.

Couperin related musical phrasing to speech so closely that he used a comma mark in his prefatory material to his *troisième livre* of *Pièces de clavecin*.⁶ Why not add punctuation to an entire passage, to help determine its gestures and its "sentence structure"? Doing the same in this passage, again from Mozart's *Figaro* (this time Act IV, scene xiii), helped me as a conductor when trying to determine the phrasing of the transition into this short vignette. Before adding the comma and period, the clarinets and horns were just bland sound. Once they became a sentence of their own, they had direction, identity, and purpose.

5. Ranum, *The Harmonic Orator*, 379 and sim.

6. Couperin, François, *Pièces de clavecin, troisième livre*, IX.



Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Act IV, scene xiii.

Assign lyrics to instrumental passages. The conductor Dr. Robert Bode recommends this with particularly “narrative” passages such as the introduction to mvt. iii of Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*. Inventing lyrics (I begin with “God, I’ve waited long!”) can help differentiate among the phrases that are sententially similar, but rhythmically different, from one another, and can give the passage purpose and context within the entire piece.

Look for ways in which one gesture illuminates a following gesture, providing a model for what it ought to, or ought not to, be. In this line from Ellen Rowe’s *At First Light*, the common jazz “doo-bah” gesture on the second beat of m. 37 can set up the following pair of eighths as a restatement of the same, with a certain amount of weight and sparkle. As the final eighths do not bear printed articulations, though, the opposite analysis is defensible as well — that they should not have their own rhetorical weight, and that they rather are a tail-end of one large gesture, hinted at by the long crescendo. Either way, thinking gesturally helps animate this music and give it specificity, emotional quality, and drama.



Rowe, *At First Light*, mm. 37–38.

Pick a piece of rhetorically strong written literature, listen to a recording of its writer reading it out loud, and then attempt to imitate their cadence: on instruments or, for singers, wordlessly. I

have taught this approach using part of the conclusion to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," and Audre Lorde's quietly desperate poem "Harriet," recordings of both of which are available. Each piece is rich in rhetorical nuance, and the two stand opposite each other nicely: the former requires flexible verve, while the latter demands subtle gradations of quietude. I still remember my teenage students repeating "Harriet... Harriet..." over and over, refusing to give up until they had determined exactly which pitches matched Lorde's voice. The rhythmic possibilities for the slight pause of Rev. Dr. King's "I too am happy · that I didn't sneeze," or the choices of articulation to play Lorde's "quick as cuttlefish," are wide, and any choice a student makes is rhetoric made music.⁷

Lastly, teach rhetorical sensibilities through other studies. No one learns to be a good rhetorician in rehearsal alone. We learn by studying balances of visual tension in architecture, by sensing the poignancy of enjambments and stanza breaks in poetry, by developing a basketball player's quick judgment and an actor's verve. Musical rhetoric has for centuries been interdisciplinary work, an adaption of written and speech skills. Why stop there?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RHETORICAL MUSIC

Musical rhetoric was once an assumed norm in Western classical music. At the end of the Renaissance, growing interest in Greco-Roman texts engendered a fascination with the potential that oratory might hold for musical performance. New, declamatory, highly performative styles were blooming: madrigals were becoming scenes, and stories were becoming operas. Musicians had already, for more than a century, written instruction manuals on the decoration and

7. King, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," and Lorde, Audre, "Harriet."

elaboration of music. The ornaments and improvisatory guidelines they practiced and codified were linked with the rising power of the stage, and figures of music and figures of speech intertwined, imbued with the power to sway, to convince, to win over hearts. To be sure, some music in the Baroque and early Classical eras is not highly rhetorical — witness the persistence of the *stile antico* — but music as story, built as speech, was in common trade and high demand.

All this changed shortly before the turn of the nineteenth century. Artists like Friedrich, writers like Keats, and composers like Beethoven began to be seen as geniuses whose minds and souls held a privileged link with the beyond, with the Divine. Composers, of course, are collaborative artists, but also are commanders, as their work involves setting down instructions for their collaborators to follow. As these artistic genius-figures grew in stature, their instructions grew in complexity. Scores grew “thick” with ink. Most disturbingly, musicians and cultural theorists began to teach that performing music was about realizing the wishes of its original creator, eliminating any individual musical expression that might interfere.⁸

This was a philosophical as well as an artistic shift. Geniuses were venerated above living artists, to say nothing of the audiences they served, even after they had passed away. A canon began to develop to protect their interests. We still think of the arts in the same way today. Demanding, perfectionist original-creators have been venerated throughout the modern age: Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, Stanley Kubrick and Ridley Scott, and Arturo Toscanini, who rose to fame as the twentieth century’s most well-known defender, against interpretive performers’ incursions, of the original intentions of the score.

8. Haynes, *The End of Early Music*, 94–96.

The shift in philosophy tore the former ethos apart. The living body of knowledge of what to do specifically to make music emotional started to disappear. It would not resurface for a century and a half, until the rise of the historically-informed (or -inspired) performance practice movement, which is still, to most young or amateur musicians, obscure a half-century into its full flowering — and, even when studying early music, rhetoric is often not discussed in full. As a result of this strange history, most music students in high school or college study only the specifics of technique, not of emotion, in music. Is it so surprising that, in the twenty-first-century United States, there is such low economic demand for the music they play?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To judge from Baroque sources, musical rhetoric's central role has never been as a performance toolkit but as a compositional one. To be sure, performance was understood in the Baroque era as rhetorical, and countless writings attest so volubly. But rhetorical performance is often written about more generally, with more assumed understanding. The heaviest explication of musical rhetoric was as art that issued from the pen, not the stage: how a particular musical device feels like a certain punctuation mark, how long an introductory passage should be in relation to the piece's first "main argument," and so on. Recall that classical oratory took place most prominently in public fora and courts of law, and that the greater weight the ancient pillars of rhetoric bore was speech-writing, more so than speech-speaking.

It is the work of rhetorical performers, then, to adapt those tools to performance, which often means relying less on detailed historical sources than usually makes historically-informed musicians comfortable. The work of active musicians in the present day has yielded the most

useful and specific sources on rhetorical performance, more so than the composition-heavy treatises of hundreds of years ago they work from, hence the preponderance, in this annotated bibliography, of modern works. In the case of musico-rhetorical performance, the lines between primary and secondary source no longer fall along century lines.

- ✦ Tarling, Judy. *The Weapons of Rhetoric: A Guide for Musicians and Audiences*. This is the definitive book of modern rhetorical performance. It covers every aspect: the purpose and philosophy of rhetoric, affect and gesture, performing techniques appropriate to communicating affect, how rhetoric intersects with conventional music interpretation such as dynamics and articulation, and history. Remarkably, it applies an impressive array of ancient sources on musical rhetoric to practical use for the performer. It is impossible to recommend only certain sections or passages of this book — anyone interested in rhetorical performance should read every word. If you prefer to read out of order, though, the following are excellent places to begin: the Preface should be read first of all; read section 2.4 (pp. 69–98) on affect; see pages 112 through 125 and 135 through 149 on the topic of delivery; for macro- and micro- structures in music, see chapter 4, pages 151 through 168 and 168 through 181, respectively. Chapter 5, pp. 189 through 217, provides a specific analysis of the rhetorical roles that ornament, the sonic hallmark of Baroque music, can play in music.
- ✦ Ranum, Patricia. *The Harmonic Orator: The Phrasing and Rhetoric of the Melody in French Baroque Airs*. Do not be dissuaded by the subtitle. Though this book is largely focused on the unique demands of seventeenth-century French-courtly art song, the Baroque genre probably most distantly removed from its contemporary styles, Ranum's analytical tools and methodology of Baroque aesthetic make *The Harmonic Orator* one of the most convincing,

powerful books on musical rhetoric available. Particularly in chapter ten, “Artful Imitations: Basic French Speech Melodies,” and chapter eleven, “The Soul in Motion: Expressing the Passions,” Ranum shows how charting out gestures and shapes in a musical line can nuance our understanding of its character. Her line diagrams are applicable to any repertoire that can be performed rhetorically.

- ✦ Haynes, Bruce and Geoffrey Burgess: *The Pathetick Musician: Moving an Audience in the Age of Eloquence*. This book focuses largely on the music of Bach to discuss the role rhetoric plays in communicating feeling and meaning in audiences in his day and in ours. Chapter two provides a general introduction; chapters five through eight demonstrate the application of various elements of musical rhetoric. Bruce Haynes is the author who, most intensely among those involved in historically informed performance practice, discusses the Romantic “cult of genius” that — as he argues — changed the purpose of classical music from expressing affect to expressing the vision of a “great” composer; *The Pathetick Musician* is something of a sequel to Haynes’ *The End of Early Music*, also tremendous and thought-provoking reading.
- ✦ Dietrich Bartel. *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*. Old saws aside, Bartel’s 1997 monograph, essentially an encyclopedia of musical figures and associated affects, is probably the best book of its type available in any century. Drawing largely on German sources from the middle Baroque, the place and period in which musical rhetorical figures were most widely and specifically codified, *Musica Poetica* offers the modern performer hundreds of models for emotional specificity in Baroque music, teaching us what a single emotive gesture “looks like.” Part Three is the most critical section of the

book, as it contains the actual rhetorical dictionary. Before reading too many of its entries, though, use just a few figures as inspiration to deduce or create your own.

- ✦ Johann Mattheson. *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* [“*The Complete Music Director*”].

Mattheson’s 1739 work is not only one of the most comprehensive single sources on musical rhetoric but on the entirety of late-Baroque musical thinking. His writings on musical rhetoric are detailed and instructive, drawing particularly strongly from the way text is set in vocal and choral compositions — a fine starting point for novices in the practice. Part II, chapter xii, sections 12 and 13 are concerned with the affect inherent in different types of melody; chapter xii’s section 14 and chapter ix are definitive writings on music as speech.

- ✦ Bénigne de Bacilly. *A Commentary upon the Art of Proper Singing*. The definitive monograph on French Baroque art-song, Bacilly’s book predates Ranum’s *The Harmonic Orator* by over three hundred years, but the two have much in common — including their applicability to a wider repertoire than their subject matter might suggest. Bacilly, like Johann Mattheson and Thomas Mace, writes with great detail, and by reading a few of his performance directions in tandem, the reader will gain an increasingly nuanced understanding of how specific performance choices, from breath support to timbre to ornament, can make a difference to how the entire passage of music feels. Read any of the latter chapters of Part I.

Far better than any of these written sources is any chance to work with living practitioners of musical rhetoric. Few workshops dedicated to this practice exist, though performers dedicated to Baroque music work with it as a matter of course. Seek out opportunities to study with musicians

like Judy Tarling, Marc Destrubé, Jeanette Sorrell, Masaaki Suzuki, Monica Huggett, or William Christie if at all possible. Though it is not directed by any luminaries, consider joining the Musical Rhetoric Workshop; more details are available at www.musicalrhetoric.org .

IN CONCLUSION

Today, an entire segment of Western society is asking itself if classical music matters. We should be asking ourselves, instead, what classical music is doing for us, what it does for you. This art has the power to transport us, to make us imagine, to make our feelings themselves curious, to grip our hearts, to set our souls aflame: and that power is too often left unharnessed.

During the inaugural Musical Rhetoric Workshop, in 2019, I was coaching an undergraduate student as she prepared to sing a solo. “I want it to sound pretty,” she said. “I want the audience to think, ‘Wow, she did a good job.’” I don’t, I told her. I don’t want the audience thinking about prettiness, about musical accomplishment. We were in the middle of the witches’ first scene in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, this student and I. It is not a pretty picture. The Sorceress and her fiendish servants plot and cackle, danger rippling under their mirth. Lightning flickers on the horizon beneath a purple-black sky.

“I want the audience to feel what the witches feel,” I said.

Don’t we all? Who, in classical music, doesn’t speak of the art’s ability to inflame our passions and express the most intimate and the most grand of stories? Too often, we rely on platitudes, lauding that music can do such things, but not doing them ourselves, because we lack the tools,

the specific methods, the frame to put them to use. Enter musical rhetoric: the tools, the frame, the foundation — a lifeblood of the past that can stir the hearts of tomorrow.

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